



"This collection of original essays investigates one of the least-explored topics in the philosophy of film and the philosophy of race: the nexus of our ideas and attitudes toward race and how they arise in cinematic narrative and viewership... As the first anthology to focus on this intersection of topics, its chapters explore issues in epistemology, aesthetics, moral philosophy, social and political philosophy, and technology and the body.

The essays... aim to illuminate not only the philosophical perspectives employed but also the cinematic examples analyzed. This anthology offers a timely... consideration of race, including ethnicity and whiteness and their connections to sex, gender, and the body, through a variety of film genres."

-- Excerpted from Foreword (pg. i)

Would the Batman trilogy have been as popular with mainstream audiences had the title character been portrayed by a black man instead of a Caucasian? In *Monster's Ball*, Halle Berry played a wanton woman so desperate for sex and affection that she slept with her husband's executioner. Why was that performance the first ever by a black female to win an Oscar in the Best Lead Actress category? Did it have anything to do with the role's feeding the patriarchal fantasies of the Academy's predominantly white male membership?

These are the sort of intriguing questions tackled in *Race, Philosophy, and Film*, a fascinating collection of essays compiled by Mary K. Bloodsworth-Lugo and Dan Flory, professors at Washington State and Montana State Universities, respectively. The other fourteen contributors

to this enlightening opus are also professors, whether teaching film studies, philosophy, literature, critical culture, gender and race studies, or other disciplines.



The timely tome arrives on shelves at a propitious moment, for 2013 has proven to be a banner year in African-American cinema, with historical dramas like "42," "Fruitvale Station," "Big Words" and "Lee Daniels' The Butler" garnering critical acclaim for avoiding stereotypes in favor of fresh perspectives of the black experience.

But this book focuses on how Hollywood has handled race in the past.

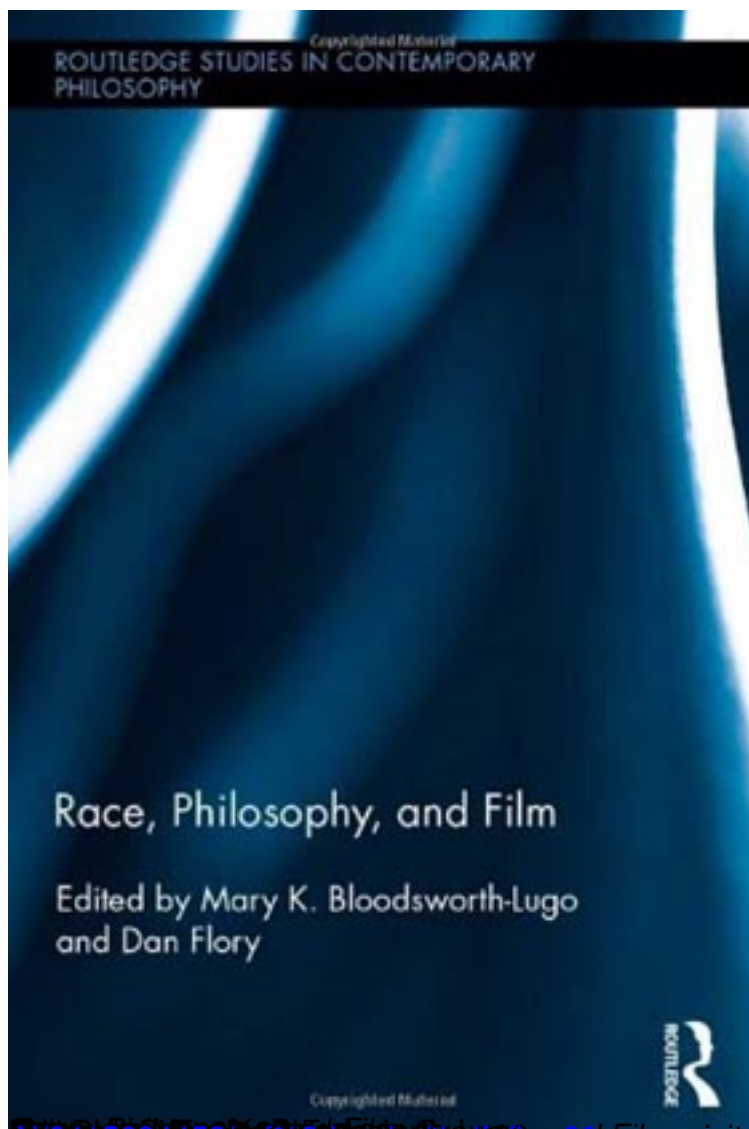
For instance, in a chapter entitled *What's So Bad about Blackface?* the author explains that the problem with that outmoded practice is that it has a tendency to misinform audiences by reinforcing false beliefs about race that are only true in a fictional world.

By contrast, in a chapter called *Hardly Black and White*, the movies "Manderlay" and "Black Snake Moan" are assailed for embodying every last racial cliché, from black men embodying sexuality, to all blacks looking alike to whites, to black Southerners singing the blues, to white Southerners being beer-drinking rednecks.

Other pictures analyzed include "Avatar," "The Help," "The Matrix," "The Princess and the Frog," "Twilight," and "Trading Places," to name a few. Because the writers are all academics, the sophisticated material might have you reaching for the dictionary occasionally. Still, making the effort will be richly rewarded since it's in service of an in-depth analysis of the images disseminated by a very powerful, belief-shaping medium.

Race, Philosophy, and Film

Written by Book Review by Kam Williams



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